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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two basic tools of audience analysis as they are used in contemporary political campaingning: public opinion polls and interpretations of voter statistics. The raw data used in the statistical analyses reported in this investigation come from national polls and voter statistics provided to Republican candidates running in local elections throughout Ohio in 1972. The conclusions reached in this study were that few aspects of campaign rhetoric have undergone such massive change in recent years as the process of audience analysis; comparatively little attention has been focused on the persuasive practices of local candidates; precinct by precinct breakdowns of voter statistics are an essential tool of audience analysis for local candidates; voter statistics are not as helpful to major candidates who do not operate at the precinct level; issue polls are an essential tool for audience analysis for major candidates; and issue polls are not as helpful to local candidates, who rarely speak on national or statewide issues. (RB)

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TOOLS OF AUDIENCE ANALYSIS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

By Robert V. Friedenberg

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TOOLS OF AUDIENCE ANALYSIS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

Robert V. Friedenberg

CONCLUSIONS:

1) Few aspects of campaign rhetoric have undergone such massive change in recent years as the process of audience analysis. These changes are a consequence of improved polling techniques and the application of computer technology to voter statistics.

2) Our field has paid comparatively scant attention to the rhetorical practices of local candidates. Yet, in discussing audience analysis in contemporary campaigns we must pay attention to local candidates, for their practices are often distinct from those of major candidates.

3) Precinct by precinct breakdowns of voter statistics are an essential tool of audience analysis for local candidates. Such candidates should use these breakdowns, and do use them, to select specific audiences to address, and specific areas in which to focus their entire persuasive campaign.

4) Voter statistics are not as helpful to major candidates who rarely can get down to the precinct level when selecting audiences and pinpointing areas in which to focus the campaign.

5) Issue polls are an essential tool of audience analysis for major candidates, who use them both as a topoi system, to help determine what issues to speak on, and to some extent how to speak on them, and also as a feedback system.

6) Issue polls are not as helpful to local candidates, who rarely speak on national or statewide issues. Additionally, the essentially administrative nature of many local offices, in contrast to the policy making nature of most national and statewide offices, also minimizes the usefulness of issue polls for local candidates.

TOOLS OF AUDIENCE ANALYSIS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

Few aspects of campaign rhetoric seem to have undergone such massive change in recent years as the process of analyzing audiences. Since 1946 when Jacob Javits, then running for a seat in the House of Representatives, employed the Elmo Roper organization to take opinion polls of his constituency in order to better determine what issues Javits should develop in his campaign,[1] political candidates have increasingly relied on two tools to assist them in analyzing audiences. The first is the public opinion poll. The second, made possible primarily by computer technology, is the highly sophisticated interpretations of voter statistics now available to candidates. This study will focus on the use of these two tools of audience analysis by both candidates for major statewide and national offices, and by candidates for local offices.

Virtually all our current studies of campaign rhetoric have focused on the practices of candidates for major offices. In recent years the nine major journals in the fields of speech and forensics have examined the campaign rhetoric of Muskie, Lindsay, Wallace, Johnson, Goldwater, Humphrey, and the Kennedys.[2] On occasions, these journals have examined the rhetorical practices of older national figures, such as Harding, Cox, and Hoover.[3] Yet, men such as these, who run for major offices, are but a small fraction of those who campaign in this country. Our journals have largly ignored the rhetorical practices of candidates for local offices. This study, by centering on the use of voter

statistics and the use of opinion polls as tools of audience analysis should provide insight not only into the methods of audience analysis in contemporary campaigns, but it should also suggest some distinctions between the practices of national and local political campaigners, for certainly their practices do differ in the area of audience analysis.

VOTER STATISTICS

Both local candidates and major candidates make use of voter statistics to analyze their audiences. Yet, these statistics play a much more vital role in the campaigns of local candidates than they do in the campaigns of national candidates. Indeed, there is no more valuable campaign aid to the local candidate than accurate voter statistics.

The extensiveness and accuracy of the voter statistics made available to local candidates is a direct function of the amounts of money and time available to his local party organization, or his own personal organization. In many states, including for example my home state of Ohio, the efforts of the local party organization to provide timely and accurate voter statistics to their local candidates is considered so vital by the statewide central and executive committees of the major parties, that the state organizations foot all, or at least a large part, of the expense involved in preparing precinct by precinct breakdowns of voter statistics which are made available to local candidates. Voter statistics are virtually the only

major aid that the statewide organizations will frequently provide to the local candidate, and that fact alone suggests the essential role they serve in local campaigns. Hence, even in areas where the local organization is weak, the local candidate may receive a complete analysis of the voters in his district.

This often sophisticated computerized "audience analysis" enables the candidate to determine, on a precinct by precinct basis, which precincts are essentially Republican, Democratic, or marked by a high incidence of ticket splitting. The candidate is advised to direct his campaign primarily at two types of precincts. First, those where his party traditionally runs well, and secondly those where ticket splitting commonly takes place. The function of these statistics is well characterized by the remark of a party official to Republican candidates for the state legislature in a large midwestern state in 1972. After explaining how to read the computerized statistics, he told the potential state representatives and state senators, "now you know where the ducks are."[4] While national candidates, or candidates for major statewide office, also seek to "know where the ducks are," they are rarely able to direct their speeches or campaign materials down to specific precincts. The size of their constituency often prohibits concern down to the precinct level. This is not to say that they are not concerned about a precinct organization, but rather that they are infrequently able to tailor a given speech to a specific precinct, as can the local candidate dealing with a smaller constituency.

The following examples, taken from the voter statistics provided local Republican candidates in Southwest Ohio during the 1972 elections illustrate how the candidate can perceive where the ducks are.

EXPLANATION OF MATERIALS FOUND IN APPENDIX

The local candidate, far more than his counterparts seeking statewide or national office, must know precisely, down to the precinct, the nature of his constituency. Because his constituency is smaller, in many instances the local candidate can knock on every door in his district, or at least on every door in those precincts which he deems most valuable. The walking tours of major candidates are often done primarily for media coverage, rather than for any immediate effect. They normally serve to allow the candidates to appear in the media walking through a ghetto, or a cornfield, presumably illustrating their concern for blacks or farmers. Former Vice President Agnew's widely repeated 1968 remark, "when you've seen one ghetto you've seen them all," is not far from the truth in describing the function a walking tour often serves for the major candidates. Perhaps Agnew might have better said, "when you've been seen in one ghetto, it serves as though you've been seen in them all."

But the local candidate will not receive media exposure of his tours through the district. Rather, those tours will put him face-to-face with a large percentage of his constituency.

The act is not symbolic. It is real. To be effective, it must be done in the proper areas of his district. Accurate voter surveys are an accute concern for the local candidate who can meet a substantial portion of his constituency during the campaign, can express his concern for their problems face-to-face, and whose limited financial resources must be used with maximum effect.

OPINION POLLS

The second primary tool of audience analysis utilized by contemporary candidates is the public opinion poll. Here again, this tool is utilized differently by local and major candidates. If accurate voter statistics down to the precinct level are of accute concern to the local candidate, and often of lesser concern to the major candidate, public opinion polls are of more concern to major candidates than to local candidates. Typically, the explanation for this different emphasis on the use of polls involves two distinctions between local and major candidates. First, the major candidate can normally afford a polling service and may also be helped by national polls such as those of Gallop and Harris. His own polling services and national polls can give the national or statewide candidate an indication of public feelings on issues, and hence help to guide his speaking. Issue polls can serve major candidates as a topoi system, and also provide him with feedback throughout the campaign. Local candidates normally cannot afford polling services of their own, and rarely deal with

issues on which national polls are taken. Moreover, even if the local candidate is dealing with a national issue, there is no guarantee that his limited constituency will reflect national sentiments.

Secondly, even if the local organization or candidate could afford polls, the public shows little concern for the issues that divide candidates for local offices.[5] The lack of public concern is due in part to ignorance, but it is also partially due to the essentially administrative, rather than policy making, nature of most local offices. National, or statewide candidates, even if their jobs are nominally administrative in nature, such as a governor or the President, are policy makers. But many local offices, such as county or city clerk, recorder, comptroller, engineer, and others are primarily administrative. This is not to say that there is no opportunity for policy making, for obviously some do. Rather, it is to suggest that while major campaigns almost invariably involve policy making offices, many local campaigns are waged for positions with comparatively little policy making responsibilities. In such instances there is often little distinction between the viewpoints of local candidates. Hence, there are relatively small, if any, issues which distinquish between them, and arouse public concern. In these campaigns issue polls are of little value.

An issue poll may prove helpful for some local candidates, such as those running for the state legislature, or other policy making positions, but even for them the value of issue polls are

often limited. Polls prepared for potential legislators, for example, typically suffer from two deficiencies. First, they are generally done on a statewide basis, and do not reflect differences among individual legislative districts. Secondly, they are done infrequently. In Ohio, for example, the only issue poll received by 1972 legislative candidates of one of the major parties was taken immediately after the primaries. The candidates never received an updating during the six months preceeding the general election.[6] Clearly, issue polls play a more prominent role in the audience analysis of national and statewide candidates than they do in the analysis of local candidates.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to examine two basic tools of audience analysis as they are used in contemporary political campaigning. We have found that one of those tools, voter statistics, are crucial to the local campaigner. Indeed, he seeks the most accurate and detailed precinct by precint breakdowns available, and should gear his speaking appearances, virtually his entire campaign, according to the information in these breakdowns. While the major candidate seeks such information, it cannot play as crucial a role in his audience analysis. He is, for example, rarely in a position where he can select specific precincts in which to speak. He may be able to pick from among cities, or sections of cities, but rarely is he able to get down to the precinct level in analyzing his audience, as

can the local candidate.

Secondly, we have found that the use of issue polls, which serve both as a topoi system and as a self-corrective feedback system, are of far more importance to the national or statewide candidate than to local candidates. The major candidate normally seeks a policy making position, and frequently deals with issues considered in national polls. These characteristics help to increase the role issue polls play in his audience analysis. The local candidate often is not seeking a policy making position, rarely deals with issues surveyed in national polls, and even when dealing with such issues cannot be sure his limited constituency reflects national opinions. Hence, his use of issue polls for analysis of his audience is comparatively minimal. In sum, the process of audience analysis in contemporary political campaigns often involves the use of computerized voter statistics and elaborate issue polls. But, these two fundamental tools of audience analysis often play much different roles, depending on the nature of the office being contested.

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NOTES

[1]Since 1946 over 200 firms have provided polling and related services to candidates. A very readable account of the way polling is used by major candidates can be found in Chapter 3 of Dan Nimmo's The Political Persuaders (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970).

[2]Typical of such studies are Barbara A. Larson, "The Election Eve Address of Edmund Muskie: A Case Study of the Televised Public Address," Central States Speech Journal, XXXIII (Summer, 1972), 78-85; A Duane Litfin, "Muskie's 'Five Smooth Stones' An Analysis of Rhetorical Strategies and Tactics in his 1970 Election-Eve Speech," Central States Speech Journal, XXXIII (Spring, 1972), 5-10; Charles N. Wise, "The Rhetorical Strategies of John Lindsay," Speaker and Gavel, 10 (November, 1972), 35-42; Thomas B. Harte, "The Rhetoric of Pox: Invention in George Wallace's Speech at Cape Girardeau, Missouri," Central States Speech Journal, XXXIII (Fall, 1972), 202-205; J. J. Makay, "The Rhetorical Strategies of Governor George Wallace in the 1964 Maryland Primary," Southern Speech Journal, XXXVI (Winter, 1970), 164-175; F. Marlin Conelly, "Some Questions Concerning Lyndon Johnson's Rhetoric in the 1964 Presidential Campaign," Southern Speech Communication Journal, XXXVII (Fall, 1971), 11-20; John C. Hammerback, "Barry Goldwater's Rhetoric of Rugged Individualism," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (February, 1972), 175-183; Hermann G. Stelzner, Humphrey and Kennedy Court West Virginia, May 3, 1960," Southern Speech Communication Journal, XXXVII (Fall, 1971), 21-33; Bernard L. Brock, "1968 Democratic Campaign: A Political Upheaval," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (February, 1969), 26-35; Sherry Devereaux Butler, "The Apologia, 1971 Genre," Southern Speech Communication Journal, XXXVII (Spring, 1972), 281-289.

[3]See for example Robert J. Brake's "The Porch and the Stump: Campaign Strategies in the 1920 Presidential Election," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 55 (October, 1969), 256-267; Nicholas M. Cripe, "Herbert Hoover: The Reluctant Campaign Speaker of 1932," Speaker and Gavel, 9 (November, 1971), 3-7.

[4]Statement made by a representative of Market Opinion Research to the Republican Legislative Candidates Conference, May 20, 1972 Scott's Inn Motel, Columbus, Ohio.

[5]Perhaps the most hotly contested local races in the country in 1972 were those in Butler County, Ohio, where over 82,000 of the 98,000 registered voters turned out-the highest percentage in the nation-and in a pouring rain. Party leaders and the local press all attributed this abnormally high turnout to the intense interest created by many of the local races, particularly those for County Engineer, County Recorder, County Treasurer, and the races for seats in the state House of Representatives.

Two weeks prior to the election the Butler County Republican organization commissioned the most extensive poll taken in the county that year. It was conducted by experienced political pollsters with advanced degrees in political science. They found that the only issues between local candidates that the public was aware of were statewide issues, entering into the races for the legislature. The only other perceived differences involved personality. In a county with perhaps the most intense local races in the country, two weeks prior to the election the public has virtually no knowledge of any issues dividing the candidates for any purely local office.

[6]The comments in this paragraph refer to the polling aids provided to Republican candidates for both houses of the Ohio State Legislature in 1972. From the author's experience, this situation is typical. Ohio Republicans purchased the services of Market Opinion Research of Detroit, which has done polling in thirteen midwestern states.

APPENDIX

HEAVILY REPUBLICAN PRECINCT

Hamilton City: Ward 1, Precinct 6, Precinct 2AF

	1968						1970									
	Pres	US Sen	Cong	St Sen	St Hse	Aud	US Sen	Cong	St Sen	St Hse	Avr R%	Rank	Total Vote	Rank	Ticket-Splitting R%	Rank
Rep	724	789	860	686	761	629	613	614		631	1968					
Dem	276	266	186	356	292	239	254	264		250	73.8	2	1065	9	16.4	19
Other	65						16									
Total	1065	1055	1046	1042	1053	868	883	878		881	1970					
R Pct	68	75	82	66	72	72	69	70		72	71.4	1	883	2	2.6	53
D Pct	26	25	18	34	28	28	29	30		28						
Diff	448	523	674	330	469	390	359	350			Prec Cnt 5					

HEAVY TICKET SPLITTING PRECINCT (REPUBLICAN)

Fairfield City: Ward 4, Precinct 1, Precinct 1DA

Rep	946	1174	1283	1091	938	429	418	480		489	1968					
Dem	536	538	400	589	755	364	344	301		309	66.3	19	1756	1	20.8	3
Other	274						43									
Total	1756	1712	1683	1680	1693	793	805	781		798	1970					
R Pct	54	69	76	65	55	54	52	61		61	59.1	23	805	7	9.9	22
D Pct	31	31	24	35	45	46	43	39		39						
Diff	410	636	883	502	183	65	74	179			Prec Cnt 12					

Total # Precincts in Fairfield-Hamilton: 53

TITLE OF REPORT (LEGISLATIVE)

Headings

County	Year (68)	(70)		Average R%	Rank	Total Vote	Rank	T S	Rank
Office									
County/Township	Ward/Precinct	Dead Vote[1]	Precinct Counter[2]						

NOTE

1 Dead Vote----an area that can no longer be identified as belonging to a precinct as defined in 1970.

2 Precinct Counter----This is simply a sequential numbering of the precincts in the district.

Col #1

Rep ----------The Republican vote in the township/city/precinct for a particular office.
Dem ----------The Democratic vote in the township/city/precinct for a particular office.
Other (AIP)-----The vote for all other party votes (other than Republican and Democratic in the township/city/precinct for a particular office. In the 1968 Presidential election this was the Wallace vote.
Total ----------The total vote in the township/city/precinct for a particular office. This is obtained by adding the Republican vote, the Democratic vote and the All Other vote.
R Pct ----------The Republican percentage in the township/city/precinct for a particular office. This percentage was arrived at by percentaging the Republican vote against the total vote in the township/city/precinct.
D Pct ----------The Democratic percentage in the township/city/precinct for a particular office. This percentage was arrived at by percentaging the Democratic vote against the total vote in the township/city/precinct.
Diff ----------The difference between the Democratic and Republican vote for a particular office. A minus (-) indicates Republican vote less than Democratic vote.

Col #2-6

1968 Election results

Col #7-11

1970 Election results

Col #12

Average R%----This is the average Republican percent in the precinct or unit.

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Col #13

Rank----This is the rank order number of the particular precinct in terms of Republican % in the total district (a county). That is, the precinct with the highest Republican percent in the district (or county) is number 1.

Col #14

Total Vote----This is the maximum number of votes cast in this precinct since 1962.

Col #15

Rank----This is the rank order number of the precinct in the district in terms of total votes cast.

Col #16

T S----This is the percent of ticket-splitting in the precinct. It was calculated by subtracting the lowest Republican % from the highest Republican % in the precinct.

Col #17

Rank----This is the rank order number of the precinct in terms of ticket-splitting %.

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EXPLANATION OF VOTER STATISTICS

These figures are an exact reproduction of the voter statistics provided to Republican candidates running in local elections throughout Ohio in 1972. These specific precincts are from the Fairfield-Hamilton area, immediately north of Cincinnati, one of the most heavily Republican areas of the state in recent years. As these figures were prepared for Republican candidates, we will interpret them as though we were Republican candidates attempting to evaluate them.

The first precinct shown is one in which a Republican candidate should actively speak and campaign. It is a heavily Republican precinct. Note, for example, that in no election since 1968 has a Republican lost this precinct. If a Republican had lost, the figures in the difference column would have a minus in front of them. Rather, as you can see, Republican candidates have consistently carried this precinct by a minimum of 330 votes, and in some cases as much as 674 votes. Note, secondly, that the average Republican percentage in this precinct in 1968 was 73.8% and in 1970 it was 71.4%. Out of 53 precincts in the district, this precinct turned in the highest average Republican percentage in 1970 and the second highest in 1968. Moreover, there is comparatively little ticket splitting in this precinct. In 1968 it ranked 19th among 53, but by examining the "other column" it is apparent that most of the ticket splitting in 1968 was caused by Republican voters defecting to Wallace. In 1970, a more typical year, out of 53 precincts this one ranked 53rd, or dead last, in percentage of ticket splitting, with only 2.6%.

Thus, this precinct is clearly a heavily Republican one. Additionally, the total vote in this precinct was substantial in the past two elections. Among 53 precincts, this one ranked 9th, and then 2nd, in total votes cast during the last two elections.

The second precinct is also one in which a Republican candidate should actively speak and otherwise campaign. It too is Republican, though not so heavily as the first. Examining the difference column indicates that though Republicans have consistently won this precinct, on several occasions the margin of victory has been under 75 votes. Note too, that the average Republican vote in the precinct dropped sharply between 1968 and 1972. Notice particularily that in 1968 the Republican Congressman carried 76% of the vote, but in 1970 that dropped sharply to 61%. In 1968 the Republican Senator carried 69% of the vote, but in 1970 the other Republican Senator barely won, with 52% of the vote. Though this district is Republican, some Democratic candidates have done well in it, and Democrates seem to be growing stronger.

Additionally, this is typically a precinct with considerable ticket splitting. Again, because of the large Republican defection to Wallace in 1968, over a fifth of the voters split their tickets, making this the 3rd highest such precinct among the 53 in the district. In a perhaps more normal year, 1970, the incidence of ticketsplitting is still high, ranking this precinct 22nd out of 53, clearly in the top half. Finally, this is one of the largest precincts in the district. In 1968 the total vote in this precinct was the largest of any precinct, and in 1970 it was number 9 among

the 53. Thus, though a Republican precinct, this precinct is one in which Democratic candidates seem to have been making gains, and one in which a Republican candidate should make a real effort, since Democratic candidates may be on the verge of winning elections in this precincts. Conversly, the Democratic candidates, having information similar to this, might be expected to increase their efforts in this precinct.

One final note of explanation concerning these figures. I have included an instructions sheet so that you can interpret these figures. The percentage figures for each specific race have been rounded off by those who prepared them for the candidates. However, they have carried them out to the tenths place when dealing with summary figures for all elections in 1968 and all elections in 1972.